

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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IS HE POPENJOY?

BY ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

CHAPTER XXVII. THE BARONESS BANMANN AGAIN.

A DAY or two after the meeting at Mr. Battle's office, there came to Lord George a letter from that gentleman, suggesting that, as the dean had undertaken to come up to London again, and as he, Mr. Battle, might not be ready with his advice at the end of a week, that day fortnight might be fixed. To Lord George this delay was agreeable rather than otherwise, as he was not specially anxious for the return of his father-in-law, nor was he longing for action in this question as to his brother's heir. But the dean, when the lawyer's letter reached him, was certain that Mr. Battle did not mean to lose the time simply in thinking over the matter. Some preliminary enquiry would now be made, even though no positive instructions had been given. He did not at all regret this, but was sure that Lord George would be very angry if he knew it. He wrote back to say that he would be in Munster Court on the evening before the day appointed.

It was now May, and London was bright with all the exotic gaiety of the season. The Park was crowded with riders at one, and was almost impassable at six. Dress was outvying dress, and equipage equipage. Men and women, but principally women, seemed to be intent on finding out new ways of scattering money. Tradesmen no doubt knew much of defaulters, and heads of families might find themselves pressed for means; but to the

outside West-end eye looking at the outside West-end world, it seemed as though wealth were unlimited and money a drug. To those who had known the thing for years, to young ladies who were now entering on their seventh or eighth campaign, there was a feeling of business about it all which, though it buoyed them up by its excitement, robbed amusement of most of its pleasure. A ball cannot be very agreeable in which you may not dance with a man you like and are not asked by the man you want; at which you are forced to make a note that that full-blown hope is futile, and that that little bud will surely never come to flower. And then the toil of smiles, the pretence at flirtation, the long-continued assumption of fictitious character, the making of oneself bright to the bright, solemn to the solemn, and romantic to the romantic, is work too hard for enjoyment. But our heroine had no such work to do. She was very much admired and could thoroughly enjoy the admiration. She had no task to perform. She was not carrying out her profession by midnight labours. Who shall say whether now and again a soft impalpable regret—a regret not recognised as such—may not have stolen across her mind, telling her that if she had seen all this before she was married instead of afterwards, she might have found a brighter lot for herself! If it were so, the only enduring effect of such a feeling was a renewal of that oft-made resolution that she would be in love with her husband. The ladies whom she knew had generally their carriages and riding horses. She had only a brougham, and had that kept for her by the generosity of her father. The dean, when coming to

town, had brought with him the horse which she used to ride, and wished that it should remain. But Lord George, with a husband's solicitude, and perhaps with something of a poor man's proper dislike to expensive habits, had refused his permission. She soon, too, learned to know the true sheen of diamonds, the luxury of pearls, and the richness of rubies; whereas she herself wore only the little ornaments which had come from the Deanery. And as she danced in spacious rooms and dined in noble halls, and was fêted on grand staircases, she remembered what a little place was the little house in Munster Court, and that she was to stay there only for a few weeks more before she was taken to the heavy dullness of Cross Hall. But still she always came back to that old resolution. She was so flattered, so courted, so petted and made much of, that she could not but feel that had all this world been opened to her sooner her destiny would probably have been different; but then it might have been different, and very much less happy. She still told herself that she was sure that Lord George was all that he ought to be.

Two or three things did tease her certainly. She was very fond of balls, but she soon found that Lord George disliked them as much, and when present was always anxious to get home. She was a married woman, and it was open to her to go alone; but that she did not like, nor would he allow it. Sometimes she joined herself to other parties. Mrs. Houghton was always ready to be her companion, and old Mrs. Montacute Jones, who went everywhere, had taken a great liking to her. But there were two antagonistic forces—her husband and herself; and of course she had to yield to the stronger force. The thing might be managed occasionally—and the occasion was no doubt much the pleasanter because it had to be so managed—but there was always the feeling that these bright glimpses of Paradise, these entrances into Elysium, were not free to her as to other ladies. And then one day, or rather one night, there came a great sorrow, a sorrow which robbed these terrestrial Paradises of half their brightness and more than half their joy. One evening Lord George told her he did not like her to waltz. "Why?" she innocently asked. They were in the brougham, going home, and she had been supremely happy at Mrs. Montacute Jones's house. Lord George said that he could hardly

explain the reason. He made rather a long speech, in which he asked her whether she was not aware that many married women did not waltz. "No," said she. "That is, of course, when they get old they don't." "I am sure," said he, "that when I say I do not like it, that will be enough." "Quite enough," she answered, "to prevent my doing it, though not enough to satisfy me why it should not be done." He said no more to her on the occasion, and so the matter was considered to be settled. Then she remembered that her very last waltz had been with Jack De Baron. Could it be that he was jealous? She was well aware that she took great delight in waltzing with Captain De Baron, because he waltzed so well. But now that pleasure was over, and for ever! Was it that her husband disliked waltzing, or that he disliked Jack De Baron?

A few days after this Lady George was surprised by a visit from the Baroness Banmann, the lady whom she had been taken to hear at the Disabilities. Since that memorable evening she had seen Aunt Ju more than once, and had asked how the cause of the female architects was progressing; but she had never again met the baroness. Aunt Ju had apparently been disturbed by these questions. She had made no further effort to make Lady George a proselyte by renewed attendances at the Rights of Women Institute, and had seemed almost anxious to avoid the subject. As Lady George's acquaintance with the baroness had been owing altogether to Aunt Ju, she was now surprised that the German lady should call upon her.

The German lady began a story with great impetuosity—with so much impetuosity that poor Mary could not understand half that was said to her. But she did learn that the baroness had in her own estimation been very ill-treated, and that the ill-treatment had come mainly from the hands of Aunt Ju and Lady Selina Protest. And it appeared at length that the baroness claimed to have been brought over from Bavaria with a promise that she should have the exclusive privilege of using the hall of the Disabilities on certain evenings, but that this privilege was now denied to her. The Disabilities seemed to prefer her younger rival, Miss Doctor Olivia Q. Fleabody, whom Mary now learned to be a person of no good repute whatever, and by no means fit to address the masses of Marylebone. But what did the baroness want of her?

What with the female lecturer's lack of English pronunciation, what with her impetuosity, and with Mary's own innocence on the matter, it was some time before the younger lady did understand what the elder lady required. At last eight tickets were brought out of her pocket, on looking at which Mary began to understand that the baroness had established a rival Disabilities, very near the other, in Lisson Grove; and then at last, but very gradually, she farther understood that these were front-row tickets, and were supposed to be worth two shillings and sixpence each. But it was not till after that, till further explanation had been made which must, she feared, have been very painful to the baroness, that she began to perceive that she was expected to pay for the eight tickets on the moment. She had a sovereign in her pocket, and was willing to sacrifice it; but she hardly knew how to hand the coin bodily to a baroness. When she did do so, the baroness very well knew how to put it into her pocket. "You will like to keep the entire eight?" asked the baroness. Mary thought that four might perhaps suffice for her own wants; whereupon the baroness repocketed four, but of course did not return the change.

But even then the baroness had not completed her task. Aunt Ju had evidently been false and treacherous, but might still be won back to loyal honesty. So much Mary gradually perceived to be the drift of the lady's mind. Lady Selina was hopeless. Lady Selina, whom the baroness intended to drag before all the judges in England, would do nothing fair or honest; but Aunt Ju might yet be won. Would Lady George go with the baroness to Aunt Ju? The servant had unfortunately just announced the brougham as being at the door. "Ah," said the baroness, "it would be ten minutes, and would be my salvation." Lady George did not at all want to go to the house in Green Street. She had no great desire to push her acquaintance with Aunt Ju, she particularly disliked the younger Miss Mildmay, and she felt that she had no business to interfere in this matter. But there is nothing which requires so much experience to attain as the power of refusing. Almost before she had made up her mind whether she would refuse or not the baroness was in the brougham with her, and the coachman had been desired to take them to Green Street. Throughout the whole dis-

tance the baroness was voluble and unintelligible; but Lady George could hear the names of Selina Protest and Olivia Q. Fleabody through the thunder of the lady's loud complaints.

Yes, Miss Mildmay was at home. Lady George gave her name to the servant, and also especially requested that the Baroness Banmann might be first announced. She had thought it over in the brougham, and had determined that if possible it should appear that the baroness had brought her. Twice she repeated the name to the servant. When they reached the drawing-room only the younger Miss Mildmay was present. She sent the servant to her aunt, and received her two visitors very demurely. With the baroness, of whom probably she had heard quite enough, she had no sympathies; and with Lady George she had her own special ground of quarrel. Five or six very long minutes passed, during which little or nothing was said. The baroness did not wish to expend her eloquence on an unprofitable young lady, and Lady George could find no subject for small talk. At last the door was opened and the servant invited the baroness to go downstairs. The baroness had perhaps been unfortunate, for at this very time Lady Selina Protest was down in the dining-room discussing the affairs of the Institute with Aunt Ju. There was a little difficulty in making the lady understand what was required of her, but after a while she did follow the servant down to the dining-room.

Lady George, as soon as the door was closed, felt that the blood rushed to her face. She was conscious at the moment that Captain De Baron had been the girl's lover, and that there were some who said that it was because of her that he had deserted the girl. The girl had already said words to her on the subject which had been very hard to bear. She had constantly told herself that in this matter she was quite innocent, that her friendship with Jack De Baron was simple, pure friendship, that she liked him because he laughed and talked and treated the world lightly; that she rarely saw him except in the presence of his cousin, and that everything was as it ought to be. And yet, when she found herself alone with this Miss Mildmay, she was suffused with blushes and uneasy. She felt that she ought to make some excuse for her visit. "I hope," she said, "that your aunt will understand that I brought the lady here

only because she insisted on being brought." Miss Mildmay bowed. "She came to me, and I really couldn't quite understand what she had to say. But the brougham was there, and she would get into it. I am afraid there has been some quarrel."

"I don't think that matters at all," said Miss Mildmay.

"Only your aunt might think it so impertinent of me! She took me to that Institute once, you know."

"I don't know anything about the Institute. As for the German woman, she is an impostor; but it doesn't matter. There are three of them there now, and they can have it out together." Lady George didn't understand whether her companion meant to blame her for coming, but was quite sure, from the tone of the girl's voice and the look of her eyes, that she meant to be uncivil. "I am surprised," continued Miss Mildmay, "that you should come to this house at all."

"I hope your aunt will not think——"

"Never mind my aunt. The house is more my house than my aunt's. After what you have done to me——"

"What have I done to you?" She could not help asking the question, and yet she well knew the nature of the accusation. And she could not stop the rushing of the tell-tale blood.

Augusta Mildmay was blushing too, but the blush on her face consisted in two red spots beneath the eyes. The determination to say what she was going to say had come upon her suddenly. She had not thought that she was about to meet her rival. She had planned nothing, but now she was determined. "What have you done?" she said. "You know very well what you have done. Do you mean to tell me that you had never heard of anything between me and Captain De Baron? Will you dare to tell me that? Why don't you answer me, Lady George Germain?"

This was a question which she did not wish to answer, and one that did not at all appertain to herself—which did not require any answer for the clearing of herself; but yet it was now asked in such a manner that she could not save herself from answering it. "I think I did hear that you and he—knew each other."

"Knew each other! Don't be so mealy-mouthed. I don't mean to be mealy-mouthed, I can tell you. You knew all about it. Adelaide had told you. You knew that we were engaged."

"No," exclaimed Lady George; "she never told me that."

"She did. I know she did. She confessed to me that she had told you so."

"But what if she had?"

"Of course he is nothing to you," said the young lady with a sneer.

"Nothing at all;—nothing on earth. How dare you ask such a question? If Captain De Baron is engaged, I can't make him keep his engagements."

"You can make him break them."

"That is not true. I can make him do nothing of the kind. You have no right to talk to me in this way, Miss Mildmay."

"Then I shall do it without a right. You have come between me and all my happiness."

"You cannot know that I am a married woman," said Lady George, speaking half in innocence and half in anger, almost out of breath with confusion, "or you wouldn't speak like that."

"Psha!" exclaimed Miss Mildmay. "It is nothing to me whether you are married or single. I care nothing though you have twenty lovers if you do not interfere with me."

"It is a falsehood," said Lady George, who was now standing. "I have no lover. It is a wicked falsehood."

"I care nothing for wickedness or falsehood either. Will you promise me, if I hold my tongue, that you will have nothing further to say to Captain De Baron?"

"No; I will promise nothing. I should be ashamed of myself to make such a promise."

"Then I shall go to Lord George. I do not want to make mischief, but I am not going to be treated in this way. How would you like it? When I tell you that the man is engaged to me, why cannot you leave him alone?"

"I do leave him alone," said Mary, stamping her foot.

"You do everything you can to cheat me of him. I shall tell Lord George."

"You may tell whom you like," said Mary, rushing to the bell-handle and pulling it with all her might. "You have insulted me, and I will never speak to you again." Then she burst out crying, and hurried to the door. "Will you—get me—my—carriage?" she said to the man through her sobs. As she descended the stairs she remembered that she had brought the German baroness with her, and that the German baroness would probably expect to be taken away again. But when she

reached the hall the door of the dining-room burst open, and the German baroness appeared. It was evident that two scenes had been going on in the same house at the same moment. Through the door the baroness came first, waving her hands above her head. Behind her was Aunt Ju, advancing with imploring gesture. And behind Aunt Ju might be seen Lady Selina Protest standing in mute dignity. "It is all a got-up cheating and a fraud," said the baroness; "and I will have justice—English justice." The servant was standing with the front door open, and the baroness went straight into Lady George's brougham, as though it had been her own. "Oh, Lady George," said Aunt Ju, "what are you to do with her?" But Lady George was so taken up with her own trouble that she could hardly think of the other matter. She had to say something. "Perhaps I had better go with her. Good-bye." And then she followed the baroness. "I did not tink dere was such robbery with ladies," said the baroness. But the footman was asking for directions for the coachman. Whither was he to go? "I do not care," said the baroness. Lady George asked her in a whisper whether she would be taken home. "Anywhere," said the baroness. In the meantime the footman was still standing, and Aunt Ju could be seen in the hall through the open door of the house. During the whole time our poor Mary's heart was crushed by the accusations which had been made against her upstairs. "Home," said Mary in despair. To have the baroness in Munster Court would be dreadful; but anything was better than standing in Green Street with the servant at the carriage window.

Then the baroness began her story. Lady Selina Protest had utterly refused to do her justice, and Aunt Ju was weak enough to be domineered by Lady Selina. That, as far as Mary understood anything about it, was the gist of the story. But she did not try to understand anything about it. During the drive her mind was intent on forming some plan by which she might be able to get rid of her companion without asking her into her house. She had paid her sovereign, and surely the baroness had no right to demand more of her. When she reached Munster Court her plan was in some sort framed. "And now, madam," she said, "where shall I tell my servant to take you?" The baroness looked very suppliant. "If you was not busy I should so like just one half-

hour of conversation." Mary nearly yielded. For a moment she hesitated, as though she were going to put up her hand and help the lady out. But then the memory of her own unhappiness steeled her heart, and the feeling grew strong within her that this nasty woman was imposing on her—and she refused. "I am afraid, madam," she said, "that my time is altogether occupied." "Then let him take me to 10, Alexandrina Row, Maida Vale," said the baroness, throwing herself sulkily back into the carriage. Lady George gave the direction to the astounded coachman—for Maida Vale was a long way off—and succeeded in reaching her own drawing-room alone.

What was she to do? The only course in which there seemed to be safety was in telling all to her husband. If she did not it would probably be told by the cruel lips of that odious woman. But yet, how was she to tell it? It was not as though everything in this matter was quite pleasant between her and him. Lady Susanna had accused her of flirting with the man, and that she had told to him. And in her heart of hearts she believed that the waltzing had been stopped because she had waltzed with Jack De Baron. Nothing could be more unjust, nothing more cruel; but still there were the facts. And then the sympathy between her and her husband was so imperfect. She was ever trying to be in love with him, but had never yet succeeded in telling even herself that she had succeeded.

WHAT IS PUBLIC OPINION ?

AFTER a struggle of some centuries, it has become an established and recognised fact, that the true and only king in this country, is King Public Opinion. He is the potentate, whose universally acknowledged supremacy is the chief, indeed the sole solid outcome of the intestine wars which have been waged, of the political battles which have been lost and won, of the individual reputation of statesmen, intriguers, trimmers, which have been made and unmade. The contest commenced at Runnymede, and ended with household suffrage; and among the results of that contest are the removal of the ancient land-marks of private influence, of faction, to a great extent even of organised partisanship. Public opinion has superseded the domination of the great houses, and the composition of

a cabinet or a ministry has ceased for ever to be nothing more than a mere matter of private arrangement between noble lords and distinguished commoners. Public opinion, again, has overridden the distinctions, and compelled politicians to abandon the characteristic bases, of party; the programme of the "ins" is accommodated, not so much to the traditions of the great organisation of which the "ins" are the representatives, as to the dictates of the popular will; and the "outs" know, that directly this ceases to be the case, their chance will come, and that their tenure of place and power will be on the same terms. In a word, public opinion it is, and public opinion only, which installs and turns out ministries; which wages war, and concludes peace; which places millions to the credit of a department, or dismisses the official requesting the sum for his exorbitant demand; which declares what are the true objects of national policy or interest; in whose presence heaven-born statesmen are dumb or impotent, or both; which claims successfully to decide, not only what is wise or unwise, but what is right and what is wrong.

What, then, are the main elements in this omnipotent abstraction, this most real entity of shadowy, uncertain, ever-shifting form, whose hues change with the swiftness of the tints of shot silk, this supreme quality, which is the distilled essence of the whim or resolution of the greatest number? It is as difficult to be sure that one has fairly secured public opinion, as it was for the swain in Virgil to bind the limbs of the monster Proteus. Public opinion, in fact, not merely undergoes a perpetual series of vicissitudes, but assumes simultaneously half-a-dozen different shapes in as many localities. The public opinion of the North is not that of the South; it wears one guise in the agricultural, and another in the manufacturing districts of England. The public opinion of labour is not, for the most part, that of capital. The public opinion of the club is not that of the village pot-house; and again, rival clubs and pot-houses give each other, on the expression of their sentiments, the lie direct. What is the explanation of this inconsistency? Error is manifold; truth only one. A whole legion of statements may be false together, but cannot be true at the same time; and if public opinion is infallible in the long run, and as a whole, there are periods at which

it must be wrong, and subdivisions of the vast complex aggregate which must err. It comes then to this—public opinion is the mingled outcome of education and feeling, of intelligence and emotion, of reason and prejudice, of tradition, sentiment, and interest. The balance that may be struck between these various and more or less conflicting ingredients, is the public opinion of a neighbourhood; the balance which can be struck between the competing public opinion of different neighbourhoods, is the public opinion of the country. What are the causes which make it; what are the elements which guide it?

The first place amongst these is due by conventional courtesy to the press; and indeed, when one notices how certain students of newspapers give one, in their conversation, diluted paraphrases of the leading articles in their favourite organs, one may admit that journalism is an elemental force with the English public. The British squire is, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, an educated, intelligent, refined gentleman. If he is not a rich man, he probably spends most of his time on his country estate, has very likely no house in London, and contents himself and his family with a month in town in hired apartments, or a two months' continental trip—perhaps every year, perhaps in alternate years. He is, of course, something of a politician. He receives yesterday's paper at breakfast, or, if he receives the journal to which he subscribes on the actual day of publication, at or after the hour of dinner, reserves a more careful perusal of it for the morrow. He is struck by the acuteness, the good sense, the man of the world air of the observations of the journalist on the topics of the day. He is similarly impressed every day of his life. The newspaper, which shall be nameless here, but whose title ingenious readers may conjecture for themselves, is in fact written with a view to commend itself to the sentiments and prejudices of the average specimen of a cultivated English gentleman, who does not hold extreme views; and the English country gentleman is gratified, and perhaps a little flattered, at finding his own "ideas to a T" ably and happily expressed. In this case, the newspaper, if not an actually creative force, is a regulating and organising force, and that really comes to much the same thing.

Let us look at the other end of the social scale. We are in a workshop in one of the great centres of manufacturing industry in

the North; or, it may be, in the taproom of the public-house; or possibly in the miserably-furnished chamber in which father, mother, and children, ill-clad, ill-fed, ill-conditioned, are huddled together. Here the newspaper is a genuine power. But the tone in which it speaks is no longer that of the easy-going, worldly-wise, comfortably-cynical Major Pendennis of the press. Its principles are violent, its utterances are those of anger. "What we want," says the typical demagogue in *Albert Smith's Adventures of Mr. Ledbury*, "is a rattling revolution, stalking up and down the land like a galvanic battery;" and this, by a somewhat hyperbolical figure, may be described as the central idea of that press, which is seldom studied by eyes polite, but which is a growing power with the English proletariat. After all, it is not a really practical power—that is, not as yet. The British working-man is, on the whole, the most orderly, best-behaved, best-tempered specimen of his class in the whole world. He has, save indeed in a few instances, not the slightest notion of acting upon the propaganda which it is attempted by his newspaper mentor, very often in a remarkably vigorous manner, to instil into him. Still he likes to read it, just as the far from particularly honest, virtuous, and devout washerwoman, in *Mrs. Oliphant's Chronicles of Carlingford*, used to like to listen Sunday after Sunday to "real rousing-up discourses," delivered from the pulpit of the local Little Bethel. For the most part, these denunciations of all existing institutions, of the rich as tyrants, of the landlords as a bloated, indolent aristocracy, of capitalists as despots and vampires, give their readers a delight akin to that which would be derived from a perusal of the *Mysteries of Udolpho* or any other wildly improbable romance. They take them out of the familiar atmosphere of their daily life; they depict a state of things which pleases the imagination. Of course they have, and must have, in a good many cases, a more permanent effect than this. Several newspapers of the class of which we now speak exist, and of these some are written with real ability, with a thorough knowledge of the class to which they appeal, and with a tolerably close acquaintance with the social and economic questions which mainly concern this class. But what chiefly neutralises any of the more sinister influences that this sort of journalistic preaching might exercise, is

the practical common sense of the English nature; and the chief opportunities of this admirable quality are conversation and discussion.

There is nothing like oral argument, whether conducted ill or well, for brushing away moral and mental cobwebs; for elucidating obscure points; for drawing a line between theory and practice. If there exist in England wild and revolutionary prints, there exists, also, an ineradicable and most salutary habit of free discussion of the texts which these prints give. Wherever a knot of working-men assemble—in tavern taproom, in beershop, in cottage, in mechanics' institute—you have a parliament in embryo; in a manner rude and imperfect, but for all that not ineffective; they do their best to "talk the matter out." They may be at heart pretty much of the same way of thinking, though it is not easy to ascertain what that way is; but, as when flint is rubbed up against flint the product is not stone but fire, so the friction of their tongues generates neither fallacy nor folly, but sound sense. For fallacy, however clumsy the debater may be, is the one thing which debate exposes; just as debate reveals, also, the absurdity of the impracticable. The public opinion of the working-classes is, for the most part, never formed except after the discussion of what they have read, or of what has been read to them. If their real sentiments are to be correctly gauged, one should not go to their representative organs or literature; but to the places where they themselves congregate. It is readily conceivable—it is, perhaps, even certain—that the blessings of a perfectly free and unfettered press, such as we have in England, may be compensated by a few disadvantages. It is equally certain that, so long as these exist, the freedom of discussion is not less free. Nothing is to be dreaded as the result of these advantages. So true is it that Liberty, if trusted entirely, provides her own checks, her own sure system of control.

Elsewhere than in the quarters just particularised, is the habit of testing the judgments and advice in the crucible of conversational discussion growing and acquiring a regularly organised form. There are debating clubs by the score in London and in the provinces. The standard of the oratory may not be very high, but then neither is that of the most worshipful House of Commons. Still, on the whole,

the language, and the common sense which that language clothes, are very far from being worthy of contempt, and the result of the entire discussion has a very distinct representative value.

Literature is also brought to bear upon public opinion and its formation. Eminent authorities and experts conduct controversies, by attack and counter-attack, reply and re-reply, in periodical publications, on the events of the day, from the most solemn to the most trivial. In fact, there is a distinct tendency to make organs of a particular party or section, vehicles for the interchange of the most opposite views, and grounds for the thinking out of the most profound or puzzling problems. A yet more significant proof of the existence of a public opinion, independent of the public press, is the alteration in tone of what were once purely party newspapers. If the newspapers have educated the public, the influence of the public is now beginning to tell upon the newspapers, whose proprietors and conductors have at last awoken to the truth, that when a journalist is pledged to wholesale vituperation of the "outs" and unqualified panegyric of the "ins," quite independent of the action of the one or the other, the gravity or character of his censure may well be rather closely enquired into, or, at least, should not be taken for granted as fair or even rational.

In London, or in any great city, there is not a club or institution which is without a certain value as being a school of opinion. The ordinary club politician may best be described as a refined and superior edition of the pot-house politician. He has views, perhaps, quite as strong, but they are couched in language which can advance a juster claim to epigram. The controlling influence with him is rather that of cynicism, than emotion or impulse. He speaks with the assumption of a special and exclusive knowledge, which, however, is after all only an improvement upon that arrogated by the tavern Thersites. The latter has been informed, in general terms, of the existence of European conferences, of the financial difficulties of kings and statesmen, of the condition of their households, and of the fine ladies who are the wire-pullers of courts. He makes a good deal of this, and garnishes the rhetoric of his invective with some wild but racy fables. His rival in higher life, the Club Asmodeus, has not recourse to such crude and glaring designs. Yet the em-

bellishments of his conversation are not always trustworthy. He draws you aside. He is in a position to explain to you exactly how such a series of events arose, and how it will terminate. The newspapers may give a different account, but he knows better. He has met at dinner the second cousin once removed of a cabinet minister. He knows the intrigues and intricacies of the Foreign Office. He is the semi-official depository of a good many more secrets than he can trust to any living human soul. Much of this may be mere idle talk. But in a select society, such as every club in some degree is, there are sure to be gentlemen who have a claim to better knowledge of fact, a clearer political vision, a wider experience than most of their fellows. These views are not noisily delivered by hearth-rug orators, standing with their backs to the fire, wildly waving a newspaper, and speaking after the manner of Thackeray's Mr. Jawkins, at the top of their voice; they are mentioned to one acquaintance, then to another, and so the circle widens, and the facts and speculations are filtered through many minds.

What is to be said as regards education, interest, and occupation, as, to employ the cant term of the day, "factors" in public opinion? In other words, what are the relations to public opinion, in which class opinion stands? Take the question that is now agitating—by the time that these lines are before the public, it may be the question that was agitating, and that is now settled—the whole of England, the question of peace or war. There is a national sentiment, presently to be noticed, on the subject, as well as a variety of subordinate sentiments, regulated by interest or occupation. It may be assumed, that so far as the welfare and honour of England are concerned, the opinion of one class is the opinion of all. But there are considerations of a narrower and more personal character, which cannot be dismissed. It is natural that the representatives of commerce should deprecate war from the bottom of their hearts. With those who may be called speculative traders, it is a different matter; and in a time of war, which is a time of uncertainty, speculation makes fortunes as well as loses them. The idea of war is also acceptable to the agricultural classes, the agricultural labourer excepted, and to the farmer; for war means an increase in the price of grain of every kind. But, after all, the class mainly interested in war is the class

of those who have in their own persons to do the fighting—the army and the navy.

We are a trading people, but we are also a military people; and the spirit of militarism has increased greatly in recent years. The English army has not, as other armies have, opinions of its own on political matters, separate from and independent of those held by the bulk of the nation. Captain Sword is a gallant officer, but he has much the same views on political and civil matters generally as his civilian brethren. He never has any notion of assisting in the establishment of a military imperialism. He is, like Captain Pen, an Englishman, and as such has the honour of England at heart; but by no possibility, near or remote, could the question arise between the army insisting on doing one thing, and the unarmed citizens imploring it to do the other. But the very fact that Captain Sword is so intimately identified with the national life and the national sentiment, suggests another circumstance not perhaps quite so favourable to peace. The army is a profession in which, as it is now constituted, there are few middle-class households that have not a direct interest. It is not merely a profession; it is a great school of conduct and manners—probably the best school in the world. If a lad is sharp and well-behaved, there is a reasonable expectation that he may become a self-supporting institution in the army, quite as soon as, and for less outlay than, the boy who goes from a public school to a university, and, when the university career is over, still has to be started in life. These facts have been recognised by parents, and some of the consequences of the abolition of purchase may be found in the enormously increased numbers of candidates for direct commissions. Now, while war means the possible desolation of households, and while every bullet may have its billet, war means also certain promotion and increase of emolument. It is natural and it is right that a soldier, who is paid to fight his country's battles, should view with satisfaction that war is in prospect. The same news may send a bitter pang through many a mother's, wife's, and maiden's heart, yet these are anxious, after all, that their sons, husbands, and lovers should have a chance of winning their laurels; and the cry of anguish which naturally rises to a woman's lips is apt to be drowned in the great outburst of a people's enthusiasm.

With a nation, in whose life the profession of arms fills the large place that it has come to fill in England, there must always be definite and growing causes which make for war. Captain Sword, of Her Majesty's Reserve Forces, has something to say on the subject as much as Captain Sword, of Her Majesty's Regular Army. The extension of the volunteer movement in England has supplied a number of fresh channels for the circulation of the military spirit in Great Britain. We have now, exclusive of the Militia, very nearly two hundred thousand citizen soldiers pronounced by the War Office authorities as "effectives." The number of officers and sergeants in possession of certificates of proficiency, shows an increase of two hundred and fifty-eight and five hundred and twenty-three respectively, over last year. Honestly, would it not be rather a poor compliment to the genuine significance of this movement, if it had not been attended with some development of the war spirit? When the contagion of that spirit has once seized upon public opinion, it penetrates the entire body with marvellous rapidity. It is, in brief, impossible that in a society composed as English society now is, there should be anything in the direction of a desire for peace at any price worthy of the name of public opinion. It is equally certain that public opinion would not be more favourable to a precipitate plunge into a reckless war.

There are more manifestations of public opinion than those of the platform and the press, the tavern or the club, the drawing-room, the counting-house, and the mess-room, which should not be ignored. The theatres and music-halls, not only of London but of England, have been the scenes of certain demonstrations of feeling, which have attracted considerable notice. It is not surprising if these have been one-sided. No enthusiasm has been possible in favour of the victory of Plevna, even among those who have loathed the race which defended Plevna so long. It is not desirable here to discuss the purely political significance of these so-called demonstrations, if, indeed, they have any. The brave man fighting with adversity has ever been a spectacle that has won the admiration of the gods, whether of the pagan Pantheon or of the British theatre. It is the display of virtue of the most rudimentary kind that has always drawn down the thundering plaudits of the gallery. That these

plaudits should have been redoubled when the inspiring accessories of gas-light, spectacular effects, and music, have been forthcoming, is not to be wondered at. Only it is well to remember that directly any event is removed from the world of real prosaic fact, and reproduced in the world of scenic illusion, a liberal discount must be taken off the cheers which greet it, and a distinction must be drawn between public conviction and melodramatic effect.

THE UNIVERSAL PROVIDER.

LET us take a walk, not down Fleet Street—for my address is to madam, not sir—but down Westbourne Grove, that Bond Street of the far West, which a few years have changed from a hopeless, woe-begone thoroughfare, to one of the busiest centres of retail trade. I mind me of the time, when Westbourne Grove and its neighbourhood were cited as instances of the folly of persons in overbuilding themselves—as it was funnily called—and Bayswater generally was known as Bayswater the dusty. In those days, old gentlemen were heard to speak of junketings at the Flora Tea Gardens, and of duels on Wormwood Scrubs; and Bayswater was voted by the authorities a stupid blunder. Its growth, rapid as it has been of late, was slow enough at first. In fact, Westbourne Grove has only within the last dozen years become a desirable promenade.

The first thing to strike us in Westbourne Grove, is the abode of the Universal Provider, a title which bears an odd similarity to that of the People's Caterer. The Universal Provider, however, is another manner of man from the People's Caterer. Instead of aggressively-pointed moustaches, he wears abundant whiskers; and, unlike the Napoleonic caterer, is a Yorkshireman. It is barely fifteen years since Mr. Whiteley, who now seems to own half the shops in Westbourne Grove, pitched his tent in that locality at Number Thirty-one, with a brace of assistants. By selling artificial flowers and similar goods at a low price, he quickly secured a large number of customers, who, by degrees, pushed him into extending his business, until he now occupies an entire row of houses on one side of Westbourne Grove, and several numbers on the other. The domain of the Provider is the object of our stroll. Let us walk in, and see what he will do for us.

As I step into Number Forty-three, Westbourne Grove, I find that the Provider is prepared to take me in hand early in life. No sooner am I, madam, in the nurse's arms, than I am enswathed in the goods supplied by the universal one. I find myself in a trimmed French cambric ditto—whatever that is—and encompassed by flannel bands, swathes, pilches, and other mysterious garments fitting to my infant nature. I am profusely dredged with powder from the perfumery department of the Provider, and I am washed—oh, agony!—with soap from the sameshelves. By-and-by, frequent visits are made to the Universal Provider on my account. From the jewellery department comes a coral with golden bells, pleasing to the ear, and sweet to whet my baby teeth upon. From Number Forty-three, again, comes curious raiment. My dumpling cheeks, quickly marbled by the wild north-easter, are protected by a silken hood, richly embroidered; my dumpy limbs by a muslin robe, trimmed regardless of expense, and by an embroidered cloak of price. When I lay me down to rest, or rather am put to bed, everybody having had enough of me for that day, I stretch my fat little arms, and kick my little legs, in a bassinet, also from the stores of the Universal Provider. When the solemn period of short-coating arrives, that great man is again called in to provide me with everything, from a nainsook frock to a silk-velvet pelisse, and my mamma is assisted in her choice of my costume, by cunningly-dressed dolls made in my image. At this period I am still shod by the Provider, who also supplies me with a hat, which gives me, in my fond mother's eyes at least, a dashing and cavalier air. As I grow in stature, I still receive from the same address costumes of serge and silk, as well as gorgeous-printed flannel dressing-gowns, and costumes for the delightful days on the sands. In this, however, and several subsequent years of my existence, I love the Provider best in that blissful period which comes between Christmas and Twelfth Night. What a bower of bliss to me is Whiteley's then, with its great bazaar devoted not to great, ugly, useful things, but to delicious mice, which run along the ground; to men, who turn head over heels downstairs; to frogs which leap, and may-bugs to put down girls' backs; to cocked-hats, holding not brains, but sugar-plums; and to wild animals with viscera equally good to eat! What store of tin trumpets, and squeaking

pigs, and barking dogs, and bellowing bulls are set forth! What wonderful rocking-horses! just like life, as the nurse says, with but slight regard for truth, I fear, for I have never seen, to my knowledge, a real live horse suffering from an eruption of scarlet wafers. What a child's Elysium is this fairy spot, with its bright holly sparkling in the light, and its Golconda, its Potosi of toys! As I grow bigger, my toys take a different shape. Crossbows and guns, peg-tops and humming ditto, assert their claims, and, finally, I am made happy by the possession of a full-sized cricket-bat. I grow bigger, but not out of the knowledge of the Provider, who keeps his keen Yorkshire eye upon me. Am I beyond the natty knickerbockers and jerkins of small boyhood? The Universal Provider is ready and willing to equip me with jackets of the correct cut for a public school, with a tall hat, and with boating and cricketing suits, like the oysters in a New York cellar, "in every style." My first watch and chain come from his establishment, as well as my first "pink;" the dawn, so to speak, of a cross-country career. The cash system of the Provider prevents my becoming very great friends with him during my college days, when terms are of less importance than unlimited credit; but when these "green and salad days" are over, and I am possessed of a yearly income, I again turn my steps to Westbourne Grove, or, to speak more correctly, am turned thither by my fond mother and prudent sisters. They make of Whiteley's a daily haunt, and are never weary of singing its praises. As somebody belonging to us, or known to us, is always getting married, or coming of age, or having an ordinary birthday, my people are perpetually buying presents, of the useful and practical kind preferred for family commemorations. They find great store at the Provider's of clocks, articles de Paris, bronzes, and ormolu generally, and excellent jewellery, made by the best manufacturers. It is not, however, until I enter the holy state of matrimony, that I quite realise the value of Whiteley's and ready money. Then, indeed, I find the comfort of getting things "in the lump," without the aid of a host of furnishers and artificers. The Provider is ready to equip me with everything, like the agent of the famous Manchester commission house, who would take an order for anything, from a church-steeple to a hay-seed. If I want a house built, he will build it

for me in any style I prefer—Queen Anne, Renaissance, or Thirteenth Century. He will also furnish it from top to bottom; with carpets, or rushes, as may be preferred; with furniture of any kind, make, or shape; with curtains, mirrors, a pianoforte for my wife, and a violoncello for myself; with crockery and china, all duly emblazoned with arms, crest, or humbler monogram; with kitchen utensils and drawing-room knickknacks; with oilcloth, mats, and rugs; with combs and brushes, eau-de-cologne, and tooth-powder; and with stationery of every conceivable kind. One day before my wedding I look in at Whiteley's, intending on that occasion, all else having been organised, to limit my purchases to a plain, but substantial, circlet of gold. By great good luck, I happen to see the Universal Provider himself, who is not at all too grand and remote to have a chat with me. He kindly introduces me into his private room, and shows me mysteries as yet unknown. As my wedding-tour will be lengthy, I bewail the trouble of passports and the difficulty of procuring eligible berths on ocean steamers; and it also occurs to me, as a prudent man, that on getting married I should insure my life. Nothing is easier. I am introduced to six offices, one for shipping, one for banking, one for fire and life assurance, one for the counting-house superintendent, one for Mr. Whiteley's private secretary, and one general order and receiving office. I find that I can not only insure my house and my life, but secure my berth on any vessel going anywhere. The Universal Provider will book my luggage, procure me passports and letters of credit, and, in short, take me and mine off my hands completely. He will also supply me with every known kind of trunk and travelling-box, from the lofty Saratoga to the natty bullock trunk, from the vast portmanteau to the convenient Gladstone. He will open a banking account with me, and procure me anything purchasable for ready money. "I hardly wished for all these departments," he tells me, "but they have been thrust upon me one after the other. I was asked to supply horses, as I supplied carriages, and now I am asked for horses day by day. One day a customer thought he would try a flight beyond me. He asked if I would sell him an elephant for his children to ride on in his park in the Midlands. It did not seem more unnatural to me that a man should want an

elephant than a road locomotive, but I thought for awhile whether I could fill the order. In thirty seconds I recollected that elephants were an article of commerce, and I offered to supply him one, but declined to give him an estimate on the spot. Next day I sent him word that he could have a fine young elephant for four hundred pounds, and requested his directions as to the delivery of the animal. He came and apologised for the trouble he had given me, and declared the whole affair a joke, just to see if I could be shut up by any order."

After marriage, the Provider takes me more seriously in hand. The ladies of my family can be attired for all occasions and in every fashion, from the riding-habit to the evening cuirass. Those buying evening costumes are provided with a gas-lighted room, that they may see how the colours suit their complexions by night; and there is an immense establishment for the mysterious operations of cutting and fitting. There are ribbons too, and muslins and laces of every price, from the machine-made bobbin-net to the choicest products of Brussels. All is not vanity, however, in the lair of the Provider. Not the least curious part of it is that devoted to what the Americans call "notions"—to wit, pins, needles, tapes, thread, and sewing-cottons. The Provider buys pins by the ton, and retails them in boxes of one ounce, two ounces, a pound, and so forth. To assist the purchasers of these articles in their laudable efforts to make their own dresses, there is a special department for sewing-machines. The literary department is a curiosity. Books, magazines, and music are sold at the discount from selling price of three-pence in a shilling; and as food is provided for the mind, so is refreshment provided for the body. At the restaurant I can offer my Belinda, exhausted by the mental and physical effort of trying on multitudinous dresses of quaint and marvellous design, substantial nutriment to support her until the solemn sacrifice of dinner is announced. The scheme of refreshment is not, I am glad to say, confined to such airy trifles as sandwiches, jellies, and the like, which purveyors less enlightened appear to think fitted to the feminine organisation. That beautiful structure is, so far as my experience is concerned, far more adapted to the reception of roast mutton than of blancmange; and the Provider, like a wise

Yorkshireman, has supplied the article most in demand. His real value is perhaps most distinctly felt, when there is a mutiny at home and friends are coming to dinner. Then he appears in all his majesty. The cook may have struck and Jeames followed suit, but domestic rebellion shakes me not a whit. It is a base thought that any live Briton should succumb to his domestics, but my friends must be fed and waited upon. So I hie me to the Provider. There is no difficulty at all. At fixed prices duly set forth, he will supply me from a list of twenty clear and as many thick soups, joints, poultry, and game, croquettes, rissoles, and patties, vol-au-vent from the noble financière to the humble chicken, entrées of all sorts and sizes, ices, creams, cakes, jellies, and fruit. All these good things will he deliver punctually, with proper service thereto, and also provide seats, flowers, bouquets, and decorations, with plate and linen if my own stock fall short. It is also said, but not openly, that if pressed very hard he will supply two or three guests to fill up gaps suddenly caused by accident—the said guests to order being quite irreproachable persons, elegantly dressed in the latest fashion, and furnished with conversation to order, be the same political, æsthetic, military, naval, or merely social. The "quatorzième" of French legend is realised at Whiteley's, and can be had with the clear turtle on the shortest reasonable notice. But this is one of the secrets of the Provider's lair.

Having lodged his clients and dressed them from top to toe, the Provider will, if they choose, supply them not only with choice banquets, but with the beef and mutton, the tea and coffee, the poultry and game, of everyday life. He offers these on a scale arranged according to market price. He sells butchers' meat, as it is called, to the extent of about two tons daily, poultry and pork, potatoes, greens, and grocery in proportion. The business done in this department is enormous, and it is a gay sight at Christmas-tide to see the regiments of turkeys and geese melt away before the heavy fire of purchasers. This comparatively new enterprise has entailed the purchase of a farm, and a farther extension in the same line of enterprise.

As the Provider has become one of the largest employers of labour in this country, he has not been unmindful of the duties of his position. He has now in his employ nearly three thousand persons, male

and female, and all are admirably cared for. A large proportion of these are resident hands, and for their accommodation Mr. Whiteley has leased several houses in Westbourne Grove Terrace; the female establishment occupying one side of the street, the male the other. The commissariat for this immense staff is a department in itself, and, perhaps, no employes are better fed than those of the great Provider. In joints alone they consume more than half a ton per diem, and the weekly bills of the Provider reach the following astounding figures: seven thousand pounds of fresh meat, forty sacks of potatoes, four thousand two hundred loaves of bread, eighteen hundred quarts of milk, three hundred pounds of butter, three hundred pounds of cheese, a thousand gallons of beer, three hundred pounds of tea, five hundred of loaf and two hundred of moist sugar, two sacks of flour, six hundred eggs, seven hundred pounds of ham and bacon, one hundred and fifty pounds of currants, and an equal weight of rice, tapioca, and sago. About fifteen hundred persons sit down to the general meals of the day, and at tea that number is increased to eighteen hundred. Their chief is not content with supplying them with work and animal food, but has thoughtfully given them the means of innocent amusement. They have already in existence two cricket clubs, two rowing clubs, two football clubs, a dramatic club, and the Mississippi Minstrel Troupe. The Provider's young people have also an athletic club and a brass band; and with smoking and reading rooms for the men, reading and music rooms for the women, and an annual ball, are made very much at home. The Universal Provider takes good care of everybody, and, it is recorded, once covered himself with glory by making a match. An unbelieving customer was going to India, and, having purchased a liberal outfit, turned round like the man who ordered the elephant, and said, "Now, Mr. Whiteley, you have furnished me with everything but one—a wife." The Provider was equal to the occasion, presented the young gentleman to one of the prettiest of the young ladies in his employment, and created a love-match on the spot. The young gentleman did not go alone to India.

The universal one being thus equal to any transaction, it is not to be wondered at that he takes care of me, when growing infirmities press heavily upon me. As

gout and dyspepsia assert their power, I again seek the Universal Provider, and buy of him pills and potions duly patented; and consult the hairdresser kept at his establishment, as to the expediency of applying to my whitening locks one of those articles stated to be "not a dye." In time this shallow semblance of youth becomes useless, and the wig-maker must be called into operation. I again take my way to Westbourne Grove, and after investing in silks and furs for my feminine belongings, bespeak a substantial head-covering for myself. Time passes till I feel the want of luncheon. I am past the solid refectory of roast mutton and boned turkey now, and am fain to put up with a plate of turtle, and thin at that. But my wig is well made, and I feel that Time is set for awhile at defiance.

The Universal Provider having thus watched and tended me through life, in sickness and in health; having poured out champagne for me in the hours of joy, and beef-tea in the hours of woe; having supplied me with a clever hack to canter on in the Row, and a bath-chair for the faithful Barkins to drag me about in; with luxurious cushions for my smoking-room, and a water-bed for my sick chamber; with go-carts for my children, and a neat brougham for my wife, is also prepared, this last time, not to sell but to lend me—or rather my executors, administrators, and assigns—another vehicle for a ceremony indispensable in some form, but looked upon with various eyes by the persons aforesaid, according to the disposition of my several messuages and tenements. The Universal Provider relieves my executors, administrators, and assigns of much anxious care, for he charges himself with the final disposal of myself; and the price being settled, he is no niggard of ostrich plumes and other trappings; he supplies the plumpest and sleekest of horses, and equally sleek men, adorned with no more carmine on their principal feature than is incidental to their profession. My casket, as my American cousins love to call it, is of the best and most thoroughly seasoned material, the handles are heavy, the plate is massive, and the full quantity of nails is bestowed around it. Moreover, the Provider secures me an eligible spot for my resting-place, where my manes will not be offended by the contact of plebeian clay. He will see me laid there in due state and solemnity, and having me safe underground, will keep me there by

placing over me a monument of marble or granite, ponderous and superb. He will guarantee absolutely the quality of this, the last of my requirements. He will warrant it best Sicilian, or best Peterhead; the sculpture and engraving to be the best procurable; and the Latin inscription to be good sound classical stuff, without blunders or solecisms, having honestly given this job to a Master of Arts and Fellow of Brazenface to execute. He will, in fact, warrant the entire monument with one trifling exception—he draws the line at the veracity of the epitaph.

ECHO.

PEALING from sun-flushed crag at fall of day,
Whispering at noon about the pathless wood,
Mourning in yon black hollow, and away,
Flying athwart the broad breast of the flood,
No foot can follow thee, no tongue can speak
Of the wild sorrow trembling in thy cry;
But Pity fain would range the world and seek,
Somewhere, the passion of thy love-bright eye,
Echo! and kiss the tear from thy pale cheek,
And bid thee die.

Alas, immortal sorrow! Love may fail
From the gray dust that shapes the heart of man;
The magic lights of evening flush and pale
O'er the deep grave, and all the stars are wan
With one night's tears. But clear, and sad, and wild,
At earliest dawn, and e'er the sun has clomb
Yon bank of ruddy cloud that lies high piled
Along the sea, e'er light breaks on the foam,
I hear thee cry "Narcissus!" Hush, poor child,
He cannot come!

So many voices cry about the world
For their dead youth—dead in its own despite;
That knew not of the dreadful die it hurled,
Staking one hour of noon against long night!
But surely, somewhere, in the deepest deep,
Beneath the golden water where he died,
Thy loved one, Echo, lies in tranced sleep;
And, sometime, he will wake to claim and keep
Thee for his bride.

A FLIRT'S FAILURES.

A STORY IN TWO CHAPTERS. CHAPTER I.

"Do you know her story?" Jack Parlbly said, nodding his head in the direction of a graceful-looking woman who was riding slowly past us at the moment. "She's had her chances, if you like," he went on, without waiting for my answer; "had them, and missed them, and made an awful muddle of her own life, and of the lives of a good many fellows, who were foolish enough to be fond of her."

"Were you one of the fellows, Jack dear?" I asked demurely, for Jack and I were recently engaged; and, after the manner of recently-engaged people, we were both in the habit of avowing that our hearts had never spoken on behalf of any.

one else, previous to the discovery that we were born for one another.

He laughed, in some confusion, I thought, and did not speak for a few moments. Then he proposed that we should stroll on, or rather he suggested that, "as Kate Coningsby will have turned by this time, let us meet her, and you can have a good look at her, Helen."

"Tell me about Kate Coningsby, Jack," I said coaxingly; "is she married or single, happy or unhappy? I've never heard you speak of her before."

"I'll tell you all I know," he said, rather sadly; and then we paused, for the subject of our conversation was cantering up close to us. At the same instant, she caught sight of Jack, and reining her horse in close to the railings, she held her hand out to him cordially, with the words:

"Mr. Parlbly! I'm delighted to see you again after these long years."

"The years have been very kind to you," he said admiringly, and I didn't wonder at his saying it, for she was smiling and flushed now; and even I, who had not caused the smile and flush, saw that her face was a charming one.

"Perhaps the years have been kinder than I deserve," she said; "but tell me about yourself. Are you—"

"Not married yet, but going to be in a week or two," Jack interrupted hurriedly; and then he introduced me, and she bent a kind, sweet, earnest gaze upon me, and told me "I was going to marry one of the best men in the world."

She did not remain with us for more than a minute after this, and during that minute a greater number of expressions chased each other over her face than I ever saw on a woman's face before. Gaiety and sadness, delight at something ridiculous, depression about something of which I had no knowledge, interest in Jack and me, indifference about everything, impatience at being detained by us—these and a dozen other feelings were legibly written in her speaking brown eyes, and on her nervously flexible mouth, before she went away from us.

"What a winning woman!" I exclaimed rapturously, for I was proud of not seeming to be jealous.

"Winning! Aye, that she is; as great at winning, as she is at losing," Jack said meditatively. "If you like, I'll tell you her story one day—all I know of it myself, and all I've heard from other people; she

has been a famous flirt, and an almost equally famous failure."

"Flirts deserve to fail," I said. "A woman who flirts must be heartless and unscrupulous, and—and—everything that's bad."

"Kate Coningsby is neither heartless nor unscrupulous, nor anything that's bad," Jack said warmly. And I deemed it wise not to question him further, just then, about this pretty interesting woman, in whose face so many stories of bygone storms were written.

But one day shortly after this he referred to her himself, and told me her story, which I shall repeat, nothing extenuating and setting down naught in malice, in his own words, as nearly as I can recollect them.

"About fifteen or sixteen years ago, Kate Coningsby was as light-hearted, loving, happy, and frank a creature as could be found within the borders of the county in which she had been brought up. Her father was an inspecting commander in the coastguard service, and her home was in a remote country village on the seaboard. The only neighbours the Coningsbys had, who could be considered as at all belonging to their own grade, were the families of the rector and of the one farmer of the parish. Their visiting was, as you may suppose, strictly limited by circumstances, and Kate grew up without any girl companions of her own class, and with an intense love for every kind of country sport or pastime. Her two brothers were her only friends and comrades. With them she would go out ratting and rabbiting, or pulling about the narrow, muddy creek in their little flat-bottomed duck-boat. While the boys were at home, Kate asked for nothing better than their companionship and confidence. And they gave both to her largely, for she was as plucky as the pluckiest boy, and absolutely innocent of every kind of feminine meanness or caprice. But when it came about that the boys went out into the world, and she had no longer their holidays to look forward to, then the dreariness and loneliness of the solitary life told on the girl's excitable nature, and caused her to pant for change, change of any sort, as a relief to the monotony of her life. She was just about sixteen when she got the change she sighed for. She was asked to be a guest in the house of a brother-officer of her father's, who was stationed in a small seaport town about seven miles from her village home. And

there she went, and there she began to try her wings. In other words, a young soldier officer, who happened to be staying with another family in the neighbourhood, got hold of her one night at a dance, and gave her a few lessons in the fine art of flirtation. She proved herself an apt pupil, and used her just-developed talents to such good purpose, that when he found other fellows were beginning to admire her, he forgot that he had only intended amusing himself with this bird of freedom. Accordingly, at the end of a fortnight, he proposed to her, and she went home engaged.

"He was a good-looking, well-set-up fellow, I've heard; and he was a man of good family, and had a 'pretty name,' as Kate argued in extenuation of her own folly in fancying herself in love with him. But he was a roué, and a heartless rascal all round. In the country an engagement compromises a girl considerably, and in Kate's case she compromised herself even unnecessarily. Her father objected to and would not countenance the engagement, and the spoilt child defied him, and fancied herself a heroine of romance for a few weeks. During these weeks she met her lover rashly whenever he asked her to do it; and paraded her love for him, and a dog he had given her, all over the place. At the end of those weeks, to the delight of her family and the girl's own intense mortification, he jilted her for a stranger; and in her eagerness to show people that she was not wearing the willow, she went in for what looked like desperate love-making with the younger brother of an earl who came as a farming pupil for a year with Mr. Warden, one of the Coningsbys' two neighbours.

"He was a young, passionate, honourable fellow, and he offered himself and his prospects openly enough on the shrine of the young goddess who had caught his boyish fancy. But the burnt child dreaded the fire. The fellow who had jilted her had done her even a greater injury than this—he had taught her to distrust all men. She liked this young Gerald Hazelton, was pleased and proud of being the object of his ardent pursuit, and showed all the pride and pleasure she felt without any attempt at concealment. But she had no faith in his protestations, no belief in his love, any more than her own having any lasting power, and no scruples about making herself agreeable to every other man who came across her path.

"It seems that Hazelton grew enraged at last, and used strong language in remonstrating with her—language such as only a jealous undisciplined boy could permit himself to use. He allowed her to see his weakness, in fact; and she, being armed with indifference, fancied herself the stronger of the two, and told him, with something very like childish insolence, that 'as it was never well the gray mare should be the better horse,' they had better make an end of their compact. He took her at her word—a little to the young coquette's surprise. And so a second time before she was seventeen Kate Coningsby was the heroine of a broken engagement. She got a good deal of blame from some people, and a good deal of pity from others, and she accepted both blame and pity in a graciously gay way that made the majority sorry that they had proffered either to her. If she shed any tears over the downfall of that basket of eggs no one was a bit the wiser; and it is recorded of her that though she was perfectly satisfied with the way she had played her own part in the genteel comedy, she would never have a word of anything like censure applied to Hazelton. She showed herself to be without fear, and she declared him to be without reproach.

"How it might have been with her if she had been compelled to stay in the neighbourhood I don't know, but just at this juncture her father was appointed to a post in a large naval establishment in a garrison town. It was an awful place for her to be put in, but she went there radiant, and soon reigned as Queen of the whole Brigade. She was just learning her power, and it came into play very prettily, as it seemed at first; for she was not only young, but brighter, and fairer and truer, we all fancied, than any of the other girls of the place. We admired her for the unconventional freedom of a manner that was always well-bred, and for the fearlessness that led her to let a fellow see that she liked him and enjoyed winning his liking in return, without any thought of marriage or humbug in the business. In fact, Kate Coningsby made herself our friend and comrade.

"There were four of us assistant-surgeons on the staff of the establishment at the time, all young, and all Irishmen into the bargain. I don't think that it had ever occurred to Kate—who is an Irishwoman—to pride herself very much upon her nationality until she fell in with us. But

liking us, and discovering with her sex's unfailing instinct that we liked her equally well in return, she let the compatriotship pave the way to one of those delusive intimacies that begin in friendship safely enough, but that slide off into love before you know where you are.

"She was so jolly and frank with us all, never playing one off against the other, or attempting to make the one that might be present with her believe that she preferred him to any one of the three who were absent, that the Irish team became a proverb for its loyalty to her, and for the admirable way in which the four were 'One for all—all for one.' I believe that we should have borne individual disappointment in the matter blithely enough, and rejoiced in the victor's success, if she had married any one of the Irish team. But before we had time to put it to the touch a Captain Lennox came to stay with his uncle, the governor of the place, and from the time his figure appeared on the canvas, we saw that the bonnie Kate might be comrade and friend still, but never more than that to any one of us.

"He was a good-looking, tawny-moustached, well-set-up fellow this Lennox, a good type of the aristocratic Englishman; and Kate didn't see in him at the time what the rest of us saw very clearly—that he was rather inclined to fancy his position in the place, and give himself overbearing airs to the other men. The fact of it was, that the curse of 'the quarter-deck system' in the service pervaded the whole social atmosphere of the establishment to a pernicious extent. And though Kate hadn't a bit of it about her, and by virtue of her popularity was quite beyond its influence, still she was blind to the fault she despised when it developed in Lennox, and she let him monopolise her, and grew into a kind of fellowship with him that separated her from us, her older friends, in a great measure, and for the first time caused us to call our favourite a flirt.

"But there was no flirtation in the matter in reality. It came upon both the man and the girl that they were very much in earnest as soon as his regiment got the route for India. She would have gone with him on his pay—for he had nothing else, poor fellow—gladly enough, and he would have taken her as gladly; and if they had followed their own impulses Kate would have been a happier woman this day, and Lennox might have been alive. But his friends pointed out the

folly of it, and her friends pointed out the folly of it, and the end of it was that he went away without her.

"She wouldn't show a sign of the pain she felt to anyone of her rivals in the place, who were watching for the evidence of weakness. But she told me just enough to convince me that her heart had gone with Lennox. They had their parting on a little tree-shaded bridge that crosses a stream that runs through one of the sweetest little valleys in Kent, and he promised to come back and claim her in a couple of years, and she promised to wait for him; but there was no acknowledged bond between them, and it was decreed that they were not to correspond. 'You see,' she said to me, 'I've none of the honour, and glory, and importance of an engagement to sustain me, and I shan't even have a letter all the while to remind me if I begin to waver; but if I know myself at all, I can wait twenty years. And whatever I may seem in reality, I shall hold myself as much bound to Lennox as if I were married to him.' And I believed her then, and I believe her now, for all that has come to pass since then."

Jack paused for a moment, and I could see that his memory was travelling back very tenderly to the day when Kate Coningsby made him her confidant. "Go on with the Lennox episode—for it was only an episode, I feel sure," I said gently. "It ended in some other woman coming between them, probably. I should never feel satisfied of the fidelity of any man who left me with such a feeble bond between us. It ended in her being thrown over again, I suppose? Poor Kate!"

"It ended in worse than that," Jack said sadly. And then he went on to tell me what follows.

CHAPTER II.

"THERE was very little smooth sailing for poor Kate after Lennox left," Jack went on; "the women were always at her mother, telling her what 'a pity it was that Kate should be wasting her time in thinking about a man who had never proposed properly to her father for her, and who would be sure to forget her soon;' and some of the younger men from the garrison flattered the girl herself into making an exhibition of indifference, which she did not feel, towards her absent lover. But she was a high-couraged young creature in those days, and she trod the thorny

path without ever so much as showing that she felt the prickles. So she rode daily with her cavalcade of ill-mounted admirers, and danced with them two or three times a week at the military balls and assemblies, and laughed my advice to scorn, when I used to tell her that Lennox would hear of it, and not like it.

"'You know how much I love him, Jack,' she would say to me, 'but if I abjured all the pomps and vanities, and turned myself into a cricket on the hearth during his absence, I shouldn't be the girl Lennox fell in love with by the time he came back. Don't you be frightened; he trusts me as entirely as I trust him, and if I heard that he rode every morning, and danced every night, with the prettiest woman in the Presidency, I should only be glad that he had such good luck.'

"It was while things were in this state that Captain Coningsby, her father, died; and you know, or you don't know yet, Helen, how everything that has been real and substantial to the 'wife and family' of an officer, becomes unsubstantial and not to be grasped when they are transformed into his widow and orphans. The change is from lively to severe with a vengeance in all cases, but never, perhaps, more thoroughly so than in the case of Kate Coningsby.

"She bore it all like a brick, we all felt that she did, for there seemed to us at the time something heroic in the way in which the poor child stood erect still, under the blow of leaving the handsome home, and parting with the pretty pony. We had seen other families turn out from the place under even sadder circumstances, but we all cursed the parsimony of a service which awarded such a niggardly pension to the mother of Kate Coningsby. But at that time she had the art of bearing every reverse beautifully, and she would have walked into a workhouse gracefully, I believe.

"A month or two after this, I was appointed to a ship that was commissioned for three years to the Mediterranean, and the last I saw of Kate, till the other day, was her settling down in a little house in a London suburb with her mother, and beginning to work as an artist for her living. All that I tell you from this point is what I have been told by other people, but I know that it's all true.

"She made headway rapidly as an artist, selling her pictures at good prices as fast as she could paint them. Her style isn't careful or finished at all, but it's always

clever and striking. You can't tell exactly what it is that pleases you in her dashing sketches of modern life; it's as undefinable as the delicate aroma of good wine. It's there, and that's about all you can say about it, unless you're an art-critic, which I'm not. She was working, you see, with the firm though unavowed purpose of making such a name as would ensure her an income sufficient to marry Lennox upon; every plan she made tended to that end, and though her intercourse with all the fellows who had been about her before he came was just as frank and friendly as of old, there wasn't a touch of flirtation in it, that everyone of them would swear.

"The Coningsbys had moved to quite another part of London from where Lennox's relations lived, and so she heard nothing at all about him, either directly or indirectly, but she never lost her faith in his intention to come back for her at the end of two or three years. She knew he could find her easily enough when he did come back, and so she worked on in full reliance, never doubting him any more than she deemed it possible he should doubt her.

"She had left a girl-friend behind her, who knew of the understanding that existed between Lennox and Kate, and laughed at it in a cynical way—not ill-naturedly at all, but because she had a fixed idea that Kate had a heart for every man who was present, and not so much as an affectionate memory of the absent one. This girl had said this so often openly to Kate and other people, that she got the idea firmly fixed in her own mind, and in the mind of one or two others; and she carried her conviction so far, as to earnestly urge a friend of her own to try his fate with Kate, whom he very much admired. This man was in every respect unsuited to her. He was a scholar—a savant, in fact—and his reputation for learning was a grand one. But he was a foreigner, and full of prejudices against the habits and people to which and whom Kate had been accustomed all her life. He fell in love with her, in fact, for her vivacity, and her power, and love of pleasing, and then he tried to knock it all out of her, because it fought with his recollections of the demeanour of the daughters of his own land. But Kate bore a good deal from him, in friendship, at first, on account of that love she always has for talent, and her womanly weakness for success. So somehow it came about that their

names were coupled together, not maliciously at all, but as a matter of course; and as they were in the same set, and his devotion to her was a palpable thing, it got taken for granted that they were engaged, and some people pitied the grave man of learning a good deal, for having suffered his choice to fall on so notorious a flirt as Kate Coningsby.

"That she was flattered by her conquest over a mind that was infinitely more powerful than her own is a pitiable truth, and she made what even I must admit to be a culpable pretence of rejoicing in the fact of having him in her thrall. She told him about Lennox, and gloried openly enough in her love for him, and his love for her; so that the other man went into the snare with his eyes open, even those who blame her most must confess.

"The awful crash came soon. As I've said, she had never heard anything about Lennox all this while. One day she went to see the young lady who had been the medium of bringing about the latest folly with the foreigner, and after a few remarks on indifferent subjects this girl said to Kate:

"Have you heard—but of course you have—that Captain Lennox has destroyed himself?"

"It is useless trying to describe what Kate did, or thought, or felt, when this blow was dealt at her. Though the announcement was made to her in such an apparently heartless and horribly commonplace way, she knew that it was true, and that it was not meant unkindly. Her friend believed that Kate would have no special feeling in the matter, and acted according to her belief. And no one ever knew what Kate's feelings were, for she never spoke of them. A long agonising illness followed; and when she came out of it her youth, and brightness, and courage were gone. But she declared that the illness was a fever, and that she had caught it from someone else, and no one could gainsay her.

"Her courage was gone, and now she needed it more than ever, for cruel reports were not scarce about the affair, and people who knew nothing at all of the matter conjectured freely about it. It got bruited abroad that poor Lennox had heard all manner of rumours about the girl he meant to have made his wife, and that he cut his throat rather than come home to find himself cheated. Kate went through tortures

of humiliation and grief, but she hadn't the sharpest pang of all, 'remorse,' to endure, for she had nothing to be remorseful about. But the whisperings stung her to death nearly, and she grew nervously sensitive about being treated as one on whose hands there was a stain of blood.

"The truth came out at last, and cleared her; but it couldn't do away with the pain, and shame, and sorrow which had been her portion. Something had gone wrong in the regiment about money matters, and Lennox, who was as honourable and proud a fellow as ever breathed, couldn't stand the shadow of a suspicion that had been cast upon him. It was money, not a woman, that drove him to that doom; but if he had known how that poor girl was made to bite the dust in consequence of his rash act, he would have lived and faced everything, I believe, rather than have left her such a ghastly legacy.

"It's no use pretending that she didn't deteriorate from that time—she did, sadly enough. With her heart bleeding still for the man she had really loved, she pledged her hand to the brilliant scholar who deserved something infinitely higher than Kate had come to be now. But she was so sore and wounded, so tempest-tossed and shattered, that she could not resist the opportunity of anchoring in any harbour that offered. But it was a wretched day for her when Göllinger declared his love for her; and on my soul I believe it was a far more wretched day for him.

"He was a man with chivalrous ideas about man's honour and woman's purity, and that very manner of Kate's which had captivated him became a scourge to his back as soon as he regarded her as his own property. According to his idea the fit and proper wife for an honest man was the girl who had never thought of love, much less learnt its meaning, until the honest man bade her belong to him. It was a grievous thing in his eyes that Kate should have loved and been beloved before she ever saw him. It was an even more grievous thing that she would not ignore having done so.

"He was a good man and he was a great man; he had made himself familiar with all languages and studied all creeds—but he knew nothing of women. Kate could not, or at least she did not, resist the fascination of Göllinger's name and fame. For the man himself she had no

love, and the bondage grew intolerable to her. Yet she shrank from the thought of giving him up, or of his giving her up, with a shrinking that only a woman whose love-ventures had all failed as hers had can at all understand. She grew afraid of him, for under the guise of a suave and gentle manner he had an intolerant spirit and a difficult temper. He wanted the girl he had chosen for her imperfections apparently, to cast them like an old skin, and develop new and unnatural perfections, that belong to quite another order of womankind, under his auspices. She could far better have stood a downright good rowing from a fellow who would have called a spade a spade, as an Irishman would have done, than she could stand the transcendental twaddle he talked to her. He made out to the girl, you see, that, though he knew better, the rest of the world would deem her purity sullied if she so much as got 'spoken about.' And it's always been Kate's fate to be spoken about. She goaded him into jealousy by showing delight in other people's society when she felt it. And he hadn't the manliness to call it 'jealousy,' but just worried her by declaring that it was all for her sake, and without any consideration for himself, that he spoke.

"He was not a good-looking fellow, nor was he sufficiently plain for his ugliness to be interesting. Therefore, when he jeered at the womanly weakness which made her see more merits than were there in handsome men, and gibed at every man as being brainless who happened to have personal beauty—when he did these things in dulcet tones, Kate saw the littleness of it all, and wasn't the more closely bound to him for the sight.

"The yoke was very heavy to her for several reasons. If she had been romantically in love with him, as she had been with Lennox, she could have borne all the uncertainty and waiting without a word or sign of weariness. But she got to despise herself after a time for her cowardice in holding on to an engagement that galled her, merely because she had made it in a moment of folly. She'd have gone on working like a nigger, and enduring like a woman, if he had clinched the matter and married her then. But he was a cautious customer, and his prudence was so much stronger than his passion, that he spoke of his marriage 'in a few years' time' as an adventurous undertaking which love of her would probably tempt him to embark

in. But he held her in such a mental and moral grip the while, that though she panted to fly free from her fetters, she was always held back from doing so by some consideration that might seem impotent to others, but that was as strong as death to her.

"Naturally, though there was an idea floating about that she was engaged to Göllinger, other men didn't hold aloof from her, for her brains gave them a sense of comradeship with her, and her fascinations have always had the power of turning a real or fancied lover into a fast friend. You see she had no real anchorage-ground in this bondage she was in to Göllinger, and so she drifted about, now striking on sunken rocks, and now running foul of other barks, never being completely wrecked, but always coming out of these collisions a trifle damaged. At last, in playing with fire, she got burnt in a way she will never get over; but I think she quite forgave the thoughtlessness of the man who did her the injury on account of its being the means of freeing her from Göllinger. To cut the story short, she fell in love a second time with a rising literary star, whose genius being of a brilliant and versatile rather than of a profound order, was much more sympathetic with her than Göllinger had ever been. And taking this man's ardent seeming for reality, she gave herself up to the luxury of following the dictates of her heart concerning him, and broke her engagement in a way that brought universal censure and indignation from even her staunchest friends upon herself, only to find that the man whose words had won her without ever pledging himself, was going to be married to another girl."

"And now," I asked, as Jack paused, "surely the story doesn't end in this way? She looks rather less like a blighted woman than anyone I ever saw."

"Who can tell the end?" Jack laughed. "It's hardly the moral I should wish you to draw from the story of her many follies and miseries, but I must be a veracious chronicler. After all, she is married, and is a very happy wife, and, as she told me yesterday, 'the proudest mother in the land.' But she has the grace to feel that her course has not been a perfectly exemplary one, and to hope that her daughters will not take pattern by it. There's this to be said, however: a woman with flirting blood in her veins will exercise her gifts

in that line at some period or other of her life, and perhaps it's just as well that, like Kate Coningsby, she should get it all over before marriage."

STRANGE WATERS.

BY R. E. FRANCOILLON,

AUTHOR OF "OLYMPIA," "PEARL AND EMERALD," &c. &c.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER VII. ALCHEMY.

PROSPER's exclamation did not disturb the patient, because it was unheard; not even Celia's entrance interrupted the young surgeon's hand or eye. He continued his inspection as steadily as if there had been no intrusion. Celia instinctively put out her arm as a bar against Prosper's entrance farther into the room. Anyone but a Frenchman would have taken the hint, and gone; but the politeness of the great nation is proverbial. And the truest politeness unquestionably consists in never feeling oneself in the way. It had already required the very sublimity of politeness to insist on seeing Celia home from Park Lane. Any man can be polite enough to see a girl home who accepts his protection; but it is only a Prosper who has such a fund of chivalry as to put up serenely with avoidance and snubbing rather than fail in one duty of a gentleman.

But, after his first excited exclamation, the picture of still life froze even his mercury, and he waited behind Celia to see what was next to happen. Comrie was the first to move. He removed his speculum, rubbed it, absently, on his sleeve, and then first seemed to be aware that there were others in the room. He bowed to Celia; or rather nodded, for his place of birth had given him nothing in common with his compatriot Sir Pertinax, and his place of training little in common with Prosper—saving always his want of being able to feel himself in the way when he had an object to serve. John March had certainly been quite as much his victim that evening as Celia had been Prosper's.

Celia's look of hope, too intense to dare to be itself, sent the blood from his heart to his face; a girl's possible emotions had not entered—out of a dream—into his single-hearted investigation of John March's ears. The room seemed to him to be suddenly divided into two hostile camps—science and ugliness on his side, grace and beauty on hers; Prosper being

only in the dark background. He groped about in his mind, not for scientific assurance to give himself, but for unscientific hope to give to her. There was a look in her face that he knew he should kill by saying what alone he had a right to say; and he, who was willing to give surgical pain enough to satisfy the theories of the great Maurel himself, shrank from hurting that look as much as if it had been a healthy dog or child. He groped farther and farther into every corner of his mental resources that he might find hope where none was; and meanwhile, with that supreme disregard for hours which distinguishes Saragossa Row, sat down by the fireplace and thought so hard for Celia's sake as to forget she was there, or how her eyes were trying to follow his thoughts into the recesses of his brain.

A moment when all were intent upon their own affairs was obviously the very time for Prosper to interest them in his own.

"Signor Stefano—Monsieur March—ten thousand pardons," he said, addressing the released patient with dignified patronage; "mademoiselle your charming daughter tells me you are a musician. Of distinction? Ah, that goes without to say. When one is musician one looks musician; it is in all the air—what you call the eyes, monsieur, and the nose. Ah, it is a bad, bad land for the music, this England," he said, looking round the sorry, cheerless room and thence to Celia in her point-lace, and thence to John March again. "It will give a woman what she will, who devours twelve great green oysters all at once, and it will leave a musician—of distinction—to starve. Eh bien. What would you? It is the costume of the land. I congratulate myself ten thousand times of to make acquaintance with mademoiselle, your so charming daughter. She sings like an angel—ah, 'Dolce amor mio!'—But what would you? An angel shall come down from the cloud, and no one shall listen if she have not Prosper. I am Prosper, monsieur."

John March was looking at him intently, and listening with all his eyes—the highest compliment that a listener can receive. Prosper waited to observe the effect of the last announcement, and was amply satisfied.

"Yes; I am Prosper. It was not for nothing that mademoiselle has had the pleasure of meeting me chez Milady Quorne. She is good; she reminds me a

little of Clari. It is me which made Clari; it is me which can make mademoiselle. It is nature what gives the voice; it is art what gives the train; but it is Prosper what gives the pay. Aha, monsieur? We shall be better friends, you and I. It is the music of England who makes the people in a rage no 7—in a fury. It is the Comus who draws. The time for England is come; I am a Man of the Time. If it was the music of the Turks—prestissimo, signore!—there would be a grand Turkish opera, with Turkish singers—Ali, Abdallah, Fatima—on the stage. There shall be no Lucia; no Almaviva; it shall be John, and Dick, and William, and Joe. I know your names—ha? You are pianist—violinist—drummer? No? Composer? Yes? All the better. All the world can play and drum, but not all the world can compose. I shall call in the morning, in good time. What hour suits you? Ten? Eleven? Twelve? One?—No? Two?—Yes? Then it shall be two. Au revoir, monsieur. Felicissima notte, mademoiselle."

And so, at last, he took his leave, having had no more idea that he was haranguing a deaf man, who could not hear a single word, than that he himself was dumb. There was angry gleam in the maestro's eyes.

"Celia," he said, "we leave this house to-morrow. I choose to be where I can be alone when I will."

Comrie started from his reverie.

"Good-night," he said abruptly, and was leaving the room when Celia suddenly put her hand upon his arm, and looked up at his far-off face so wistfully that, just to have given another answer than he must, he would have let his father's creditors go unpaid for ten years more to come.

"Can he be cured?" cried out Celia—"Can you cure him?"

"Maurel could not cure him," he blurted out, instead of the gentle way of breaking the bad news for which he was seeking.

"You—mean——"

An impulse of pity broke through his shyness; he took both her gloved hands in one of his own, and covered them with the other. They were cold as ice, the excitement of the evening had driven back all the blood to her heart, and anxiety held it there—the citadel needed all the forces it could muster. Except as a part of diagnosis, he had never held a girl's hands together like this before; and even now professional instinct made him look

for the fever in her eyes that should harmonise with the icy hands.

"Go to bed, lassie," he said, "and sleep off the late hours. They'll be bad for you. As to the case—I never meant you to hope; and that's why I—but as it's done, it can't be undone. Nature's a strange woman, and most often she'll get people's ears and suchlike into scrapes just to show how cleverly she can get them out again—but no; there's nothing to be done here. It would just be cruel to give hope where there's none. He'll be deaf to the end."

"Celia!" said her father grimly.

Surely the Master seemed being blotted out of the world. He had been feeling it himself until his lonely reverie had been interrupted by the intrusion of Comrie. And his feeling was well founded, beyond all question. "Finis" had blotted him out of his life's work, and his life's work out of the world. Lady Quorne's invitation had practically released Celia from her slavery and his tyranny. The suddenly remembered mantilla had turned what might have been into a lost reality—what had been, into a dream and the ghost of a dream. Even his loneliness was not his own. The Scotch doctor, the French impresario, all the world as two strangers seemed to one solitary man, came and went, Heaven knew why, as if the little bare room was an open tavern—except that it contained nothing to buy but a bundle of music-paper, out of which the life and soul were dying out, slowly and surely, day by day. And now Celia, in the very dress of Noëmi, was standing before him, with her hands as passively in those of a strange young man as if he were blotted out of sight as well as out of hearing. It was time for him to vindicate, not his will, but his very existence, in common with tables and chairs.

"I thank you," he said, with saturnine politeness to Comrie. "I presume it is to your interest in Miss March, my daughter, that I owe the interest you have been pleased to take in my ears. You need not tell me I am past cure—I know that as well as you—and—well, that matters little. There is only one thing I ever wanted to hear," he said, with a backward glance towards the score, "and that will never be heard. One wants no ears to sit by oneself and wait for the end. As you may perceive, I am not in need of any company but my own. It vexes me to the heart that I am unable to offer you at present a suitable fee for your pro-

fessional attendance; but I am not in the habit of forgetting my debts, and I do not choose to be obliged to any man. I will take care that you shall not have to look back on more wasted time and labour than you need. And now, perhaps, you will add to your kindness by leaving me for a little while alone. It is not much to ask of any man—in one's own room. You will find the passage dark; I will light you to the stairs."

"Indeed"—Comrie was beginning; but he suddenly remembered that it was of no more use to speak to John March than to the door. To have left hope behind him he would have given up ten—no, twenty years of fees. He felt a new and strange kind of tender pity for the girl who had to pass her days in looking after, and in the sole companionship of, this deaf and irritable old man. If he had only known the strong will that was seething with barren rage against impotence of sense, he would have pitied her ten times more—almost as much as he would have pitied the man. A deaf musician—even Comrie, to whom music was a dead thing—was almost beginning to comprehend what such words mean.

No, not even Celia could understand it all. Even to her it seemed as if the man who that evening had been living through the bitterest tragedy that this world of tragedies has surely ever known, was rejecting out of savage ill-temper the one only friend whom chance had thrown in their way.

"My father has too much to bear," she said to Comrie. "You had better go—you had better not come again," she went on, with a sigh more bitter even than that with which she had made her broken vow never to see Walter Gordon again. "I—we—are grateful to you indeed—what can I say?" she ended, with the bitterest sigh of all.

"I know—I know," he said, with his heart in his throat. "You are a good lassie—and I know; I know."

What did he know? He did not ask or answer the question as he went down the dark staircase one step at a time instead of his usual three; but, if he had, he could have answered nothing, but "Nothing."

"Well—Celia?"

Think of what it would mean, to anybody but a skilled letter-writer, or a practised journalist, to be called upon, at a moment's notice, to give a detailed account

of a private concert at a strange house, which had lasted for hours. The mere writing it out would require thought and time. Celia, writer of neither letters nor of articles, had to explain, moreover, what she had sung, and why; how it was that Prosper had seen her home; what had happened between her and Walter Gordon; what, if anything, was to come of her reintroduction to Lady Quorne. She could only rest her pencil on her paper in sheer despair.

Her father waited for some moments in dead silence—and then, with tenfold force, his whole doom fell over him. Montaigne tells a story of how some conquered and captive king bore, with dry eyes and serene brows, his own defeat and dishonour, the loss of his kingdom, the sight of his sons led before him into slavery, of his queen and of his daughters dragged before his eyes into shame—all, till the long procession was closed by the sight of some mean slave driven by accustomed blows from the service of one tyrant, whose wages had been stripes, into that of another who gave stripes for wages. At that sight the royal composure broke down—he who had borne all the rest, without a sign of pain for his conquerors to scoff at, broke down and wept aloud at the sight of the slave, on whom he had never set eyes until now. It was a straw—but it had turned the balance; only a drop, but it made the cup overflow. John March had lived through his tragedy—it was not much that it happens to take a long time to tell a long story. But it signified so much—the way in which both bodily disease and mental isolation condemned him to double loneliness—the solitude of silence without sympathy. Had he been on a desert island he could not have been so much alone—for even on a desert island is the company of winds and waves, whose voice is heard. Pictures are not a musician's comrades, if they are any man's.

The world had rolled round him, and was still rolling round; he had never taken part therein, and it was too late for a deaf man to begin. The opening of his heart before Comrie's visit had been bitter suffering, and yet not without a touch of sweetness—for opening must mean relief, always. There was the dream of what might have been idle—enough, but, in dreams, the idler the sweeter. But now he felt a dread so intense and so conscious, as to be horrible—a dread without one faintest touch of sweetness to take away

from its absolute horror. He literally felt the membrane of his heart petrifying, like that of his ears. You do not comprehend the sensation? So much the better for you. People know what despair means, or at least they fancy they do; anyway, they can define it after a fashion. But this was the step beyond despair. Despair is an emotion—this was the dread that emotion will be felt no more; the dread of a dead soul in a living man. What on earth was left for him to feel? Bodily hunger, perhaps—nothing more.

Still Celia touched the paper with the point of her pencil, pondering how to compress a thousand words into one, when, looking up for inspiration, her eyes were caught by a look on her father's face that made her blind to all else, so strange was it and so ghastly. The strong, harsh lines that she knew so well seemed to have taken new forms in the gray colour—the always dull eyes had turned into spots of pain. What was happening?

Celia sprang to her father's side and seized his hands. She was more terrified than even her timid self had ever been—but for him, and no longer of him. He seemed rigid and unconscious. What was to be done? Had the surgeon's verdict been too great for him to bear? Had he broken down under the strain of self-suppression?

Comrie!

It was an inspiration. Celia left her father in his chair, sprang down the dark stairs. She did not know the surgeon's room, but divine instinct, always unerring when given free head, led her there. She knocked in an agony.

"Who's there? What is it?" said the surgeon in a voice muffled by bedclothes.

"Me—Celia March. Come, for God's sake! my father is——" Dying was on her lips, and must have reached the surgeon as surely as if it had left them.

"One moment," said the surgeon. "Ran up again; I'll follow you."

Celia ran up fast; but, though Comrie must have managed to find time to dress, he was hardly six steps behind her.

It may be that John March had swooned; and none can call it well that he had not swooned for ever, and gone where, if there be music, there are no deaf ears. But even now, Nature had done her work with her inveterate imperfection. John March was standing upright before his desk, pale as ashes, trembling in every limb, but des-

perately alive. He was holding the back of his chair, as if to steady himself, but there was no weakness in the grasp.

"Here again?" he said to Comrie.

"Thank God!" breathed Celia. She wrote hurriedly: "I—brought—him—because—you—were—ill."

"I am not ill. Bring me my score. I mean," he said, as if consciously grasping truant wits and forcing them back to their duty, "I mean, leave me alone."

Celia looked her question of Comrie, "Is it wise?"

"Wait till he goes to bed, and don't speak to him. It's been a faint; but if you want me, I'll not be in bed, and I'll run up at the first word. Don't be down-hearted, lassie. You were right to fetch me, but I'll not be in the way, till you want me again."

"This is beyond bearing!" said John March, so soon as the door was closed again. "I can't even close my eyes but I am waked up by all the world. I do not choose to be made a sight of, and to be made a subject for every medical student to try his hand upon. I will be left one thing to have my way in. Lock the door. No—I shall sit up; but I will be alone."

He sat down by the fireplace. Was he going to sit there all night? thought poor Celia. Was he really going insane? It was not for her to comprehend, even had she known, the sense of impotence that makes children of the greatest men—and makes them feeble just in proportion as they are by nature strong. But she could not disobey the doctor. She was wearied out with all the things of that night; her veins were burning and her whole heart was tired. But she took out her poor little account-book once more, and, dressed in lace that a queen would have found dear, tried to bring all her wit to bear upon the fact that the six shillings of a week ago had dwindled down to one; while how much they were now in debt to Mrs. Swann, who could tell?

One shilling—and she heard the wolf at the door. And she had just come from among lords and ladies in Park Lane, dressed in lace that—

At least she could put off that piece of irony, and attend to such accounts as hers in the more fitting dress of Cinderella before the advent of the fairy godmother. Her father was still gazing at the bars of

the grate, not even smoking. Tobacco consoles, but the smoker who is beyond comfort instinctively lays it by. As she took off the lace, something white, she saw, was fastened to it which had not been there when she put it on.

Surely all the godmothers in Fairyland were abroad that night, or never. They had sent her the lace, the gloves, the cab, just when they were wanted. And now the howl of the wolf at the door grew fainter, as she unpinned, from a fold of the mantilla, an envelope for Miss March, containing a banknote for five pounds.

Five pounds is little enough; but it is great enough to make all the difference between rich and poor. But how had it come there? Not by accident, for there was her name. She examined the hand; it was unknown. And it was so cunningly fastened to the magic lace that she might have worn it unknowingly all the evening, for aught she could tell. She examined the envelope more closely, and read under the cover:

"A loan. When you can, pay it back to whom you will."

Which meant, When you are rich, repay the lender by giving it to the poor. Who was this unknown wolf-chaser? Prosper? But in that case he would have signed his name with a flourish—a trumpet flourish—at the end. Her heart beat. Who could it be but Walter Gordon?

The thought reconciled her to the gift. For no Lindenheimer scruples to take help aus Lindenheim. Fellowship in art may have few merits, but it has one—one may take without loss of pride, and give without fear of being refused. And surely no fingers but the cleverest in the world could have contrived this delicate piece of legerdemain.

There was no use in wishing that it had not been. Pride is of course a virtue, although we pretend to call it a sin. But, after all, a girl who prefers her own pride to her father's life would be very unlike Celia. She would be infinitely more heroic; but then Celia never had the making of a heroine. And it was so natural to be helped by Walter, that—well the sweetness of that thought perfumed even such a thing as a note for five pounds. It may be better to give, but only a special grace enables one to receive. "Yes," she said to herself as she kissed the note, "I will pay back the loan."